PR3004.L8 nd 32

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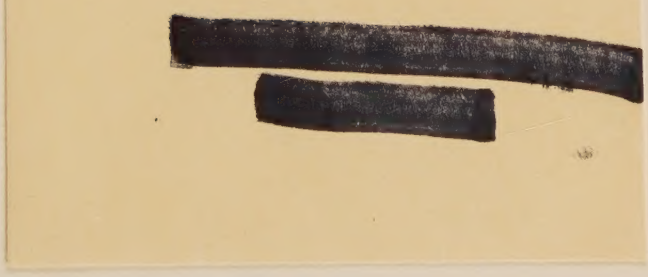
DATE DUE

APR 26 1972 NOV 24 '03
JUN 9 1975 MAY 17 '04
AUG 19 '04
9/20/99
AUG 07 '02
DEC 05 '02
MAY 12 '03
JUL 16 '03
AUG 18 '03
OCT 23 '03

GAYLORD M-2 PRINTED IN U.S.A.



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SHAKESPEARE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

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A BRIEF STUDY OF FOLKLORE, SUPERSTITION, AND WITCHCRAFT, IN 'MACBETH,' 'MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM' AND 'THE TEMPEST'

BY

MARGARET LUCY

WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE SUBJECT BY

WILLIAM JAGGARD.

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LIVERPOOL: At the Shakespeare Press
Jaggard & Company XIII Moorfields MCMVI

82.61

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PREFACE

In the three plays under discussion the denizens of the unseen world are evidenced as powers which move mankind. As each play unfolded itself to me, so have I endeavoured to write, feeling that the author's words could best illustrate his meaning

This little work was prepared as a paper for the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare Club and read in November 1904. The generous reception then given it has encouraged me to lay it before the public with all "its imperfections on its head"

Asking only that a kind indulgence may be shown this tribute to one who worked not only for his own land but for all lands, and whose influence is not for an age but for all time

I subscribe myself

MARGARET LUCY

Stratford-upon-Avon

'MACBETH'

Elizabethan belief in Witchcraft: Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Edward Coke, Dr. John Dee, the Queen's Astrologer. Power of the Witches over the Element and the Waxen Figure. Fate of the Witches. Shakespeare's Witchlore pure symbolism.

'Pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraised spirit that hath dar'd
. . . . . to bring forth
So great an object.'

King Henry V.

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

'What . . . .
I did not well I meant well.'

Winter's Tale.

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

'All these things here collected are not mine;
But divers grapes make but one kind of wine;
So I from many authors took
The . . . matter written in this book;
What's not mine own shall not by me be father'd
For the most part I in many years have gather'd.'

Taylor, the Water-Poet.

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

TO commence with the beautiful words of Carlyle:—

'The day of magic has gone by; Witchcraft has been put a stop to by Act of Parliament. But the mysterious relations which it emblemed still continue; the Soul of man still fights with the dark influences of Ignorance, Misery

and Sin . . . still follows false shows, seeking peace and good on paths where no peace or good is to be found.'

The popular belief in witchcraft is often alluded to by Shakespeare : the religious and dramatic literature of the day being full of it. Mr. Williams, in his 'Superstitions of Witchcraft' writes :—'What the vulgar superstition must have been may easily be conceived when men of the greatest genius or learning credited the possibilities, and not only the theoretical but possible occurrence, of these infernal phenomena.'

Thus Sir Francis Bacon was 'not able to get rid of the principles upon which the creed was based,' and Sir Edward Coke, his contemporary, the most acute lawyer of the age, ventured even to define the devil's agents in witchcraft.

When equally learned men devoted their energies to the search for the Philosopher's Stone and the Aquæ Vitæ, when the great and famous had their nativity cast, when faith was placed in lucky and unlucky days, when Queen Elizabeth herself consulted the well known alchymist, Dr. John Dee, as to the most fortunate day for her coronation—when such I say, was the spirit of the age, it would be unnatural for any man to live in such surroundings quite unmoved.

Again, too, it must be remembered that symbolism was then much employed. The ignorant

people would be far more readily taught, when in Miracle, Mystery, and Morality plays not only Biblical characters but hidden powers which move mankind were put before them in visible form—especially in the Morality plays, where men symbolised the opposing qualities of the Virtues and the Vices. So that whether Shakespeare in his three plays of 'Macbeth,' 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and "The Tempest," intends that all he said about the supernatural should be taken literally or as allegorical, the language and the imagery which he employed were such that each hearer could interpret according to his condition or temperament.

It may be argued, I know, that the grand simplicity is lost when the search for double meaning is begun—that 'men may construe things after their fashion; clean from the purpose of the things themselves.'

Yet the view accepted by Gervinus and others is that when Shakespeare made use of the marvellous, he did so in a purely symbolical sense, using the two materials of truth and nature. These materials, when used by any hand, never fail to impress, but when that hand be the hand of a master, carry with them an irresistible force. His teaching, therefore, was for no one class, but for all classes, for no one character, but for all characters.

In 'Macbeth' the educated man would, with a fine discrimination, trace the workings of the mind,

follow the tortured soul in all its windings, and with a logical certainty shadow the chain of events which must follow, given certain conditions.

The highly strung or emotional, by the very force of sympathy, would fully enter into the psychological struggle. That struggle before which when the heavens see, they tremble and are still.

The ignorant, whose perceptions are all undeveloped, would yet observe in the Weird Sisters, the impersonation of those vices with which the Morality plays had made him familiar.

Even that most trying subject, the indifferent, could not fail to be impressed, though, to his mental vacuity, the finer meaning would 'be as Greek.'

And, as I understand this play of 'Macbeth,' we are shown how the same temptation may present itself to men of opposing natures. How to the one its attainment appears as the one thing needful to make life worth living, while the other, though perceiving all the allurements, can put them aside, knowing that :—

> . . . 'Oftentimes to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
> In deepest consequence.'

But whatever construction be placed upon 'Macbeth' as a play at least one thing is sure, that in it Shakespeare has preserved many curious legends

and scraps of Witch-Lore which might have otherwise been lost to mankind.

The first mention of the Witches' power over the winds is in Act 1.

2nd W.—'I'll give thee a wind.'
1st W.—'Thou'rt kind.'
3rd W.—'And I another.'
1st W.—'I myself have all the other.
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' the shipman's card.
I will drain him dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
Weary se'nnight's nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine;
Though his bark cannot be lost
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.'

And in that one speech lie two very interesting items about old-time Witches, namely, their power over the elements and the slow torture of the waxen figures; for it was believed that by making a little waxen figure of the person upon whom their ill-will had fallen, by sticking pins in it, and by holding it to a fire until it slowly melted away, so would that person suffer, dwindle, and die.

'Weary se'nnight's nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine,'

is the first allusion; the second is—

'Though his bark cannot be lost
Yet it shall be tempest tost.

Fully explaining these references is the following legend :—

Satan, a foe to the Reformation, was much alarmed because King James 6th of Scotland and 1st of England married the Princess Anne of Denmark, a member of the Reformed Church. To stave off the consequences of this act to the realms of Evil, he first sent a thick mist over the sea, in the hope that the vessel which carried the king and his bride would be stranded.

This plot having failed, all the Witches were summoned to meet their master. So on All Hallowmass Eve there assembled upwards of two hundred Witches and several Warlocks. Each embarking in a riddle or sieve, they sailed 'over the sea very substantially.' There they met a friend carrying a cat which had already been drawn nine times through the fire. The fiend delivered it to a Warlock and immediately there arose a great tempest. Having sailed gaily over the storm thus raised, they landed, and sieves in hand marched to the haunted kirk of North Berwick, where the Devil was to hold a preaching. Arriving at the kirk they paced round it 'withershines,' that is, in reverse order to the apparent motion of the sun. The Devil's secretary, Dr. Fian, blew upon the keyhole of the door, which immediately opened, and all entered ; he then blew upon the candles, which immediately lighted and revealed the Devil in the pulpit. Before beginning

his address the Devil asked what success had attended the operations against the royal pair. Grey Meill, a crazy old Warlock, who acted as beadle or door-keeper, was foolish enough to reply :—'That nothing ailed the king yet, God be thanked,' upon hearing which the Devil angrily boxed his ears for him. Two of the Witches, Agnes Sampson and Euphemia Macalzean, then asked whether he (the Devil) had brought the image or picture of King James, that by pricking it they might cause pains and diseases to fall upon him. The father of lies spoke truth for once and confessed he had forgotten it. Whereupon the women gave him a good round scolding for his pains, all of which he took in good part, and when order was restored, regaled them with a ghoulish feast. Their host was most generous in the matter of drink, for he gave so much excellent wine that soon all became very lively. A Witch played the old tune upon her trump and the Devil himself led off the dance with Euphemia Macalzean. Thus they kept up the sport until the cock crew.

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

It is a fact that in 1591 a curious 'confession' was wrung from the Witch Agnes Sampson, the 'Wise Woman of Keith' as she was called, to the effect that at the time his Majesty was in Denmark she took a cat, and having christened it, she bound it to several joints from the body of a dead man, and that in the night following the said cat was conveyed

into the midst of the sea by herself and several Witches, sailing in their riddles or sieves, and so left the said cat right before the town of Leith in Scotland. This done there arose such a tempest in the sea 'as a greater hath not been seen,' which tempest was the cause of the perishing of a boat or vessel coming from Brunt Island to the town of Leith. Again it is confessed that the said christened cat was the cause of His Majesty's ship, 'at his coming forth of Denmark,' having a contrary wind to the rest of the ships then in his company; which thing was most strange and true, as the King's Majesty acknowledged. The fate of the Witches mentioned by name in the legend is a sad one. Agnes Sampson and Dr. Fian were hanged, the latter having first suffered the torture of the boot, while Euphemia Macalzean was doomed to be bound to a stake and burned in ashes 'quick to the death.'

One of the most extraordinary features of this extraordinary time was that the victims themselves, even before torture was applied, would 'confess' that they had dealings with the Evil One, so acknowledging the justice of their sentence, according to the existing law of the land. No mercy was shown to the most highly born and highly educated. Euphemia Macalzean was the daughter of Lord Cliftondale, while Dr. Fian, alias Cunningham, was a small schoolmaster; of Agnes Sampson all that I find recorded is that 'she was a grave and matron-like person.'

In an issue of the 'Birmingham Mail' for November 5th, 1903, occurs the following belief of olden days, and as it concerns Dr. John Dee, astrologer to Queen Elizabeth, I venture to repeat it.

'There are several accounts of the manner in which the Gunpowder Plot was discovered, but among the students of Occult Science the belief is that its timely discovery was made by Dr. John Dee, by means of a magic mirror. Proof of how general this belief was at one time is given by the fact that in some editions of the Book of Common Prayer, published in the eighteenth century, is to be found an engraving inserted before the service for the Fifth of November depicting a circular mirror on a stand, in which is a reflection of the Houses of Parliament by night, and a person carrying a dark lantern. On the left side may be observed two men in the costume of the reign of King James, looking into the mirror. On the right side, at the top, the eye of Providence throws a ray on the mirror. Beneath are legs and hoofs, as if evil spirits were making their exit.'

Enough has been said I think to show how deeply rooted was the popular belief in witchcraft, how it impregnated the air and how difficult it would be, especially for an impressionable man, to entirely escape in moments of strong feeling the influence of what his calmer judgment told him was false.

Be that as it may, Shakespeare had a higher and a deeper motive, I think, when he wrote the play of

'Macbeth,' than to merely describe scenes of Witchcraft, but his knowledge of human nature was such that he knew he must train the outer eye before he could reach the inner, and so he drew the Blasted Heath and the Weird Sisters. Where the casual observer would see only the Blasted Heath and the Weird Sisters the higher intelligence would see one of the deadliest struggles that ever entered into the mind of man to conceive, or was given to the hand of man to write.

* * *

The hour has now come which comes more or less to all—the note is now to be struck which will tone the whole life. For there upon that Blasted Heath stood those Weird Sisters, and there within those human hearts lay those Evil Passions. And there, advancing to their fate, came those two men.

The Weird Sisters, the Evil Passions, may lay snares, deceive, tempt, but, says Gervinus, 'have no authority with fatalistic power to do violence to the human will; they are but the embodiment of the inward temptation,' and can never be man's fate until he delivers himself into their keeping.

Even then it is:—

> 'The sin that practice burns into the blood,
> And not the one dark hour that brings remorse,
> Will brand us after of whose fold we be.'
>
> '*Merlin and Vivien.*

And so the two men and the one temptation stand face to face and for what end?

Note the two prophecies—

'Thou shalt be king hereafter.'

. . 'Thou shalt get kings though thou be none.'

And where the one to be

'King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,'

would

play most foully for't.'

the other knew that to 'get kings' was as naught, did he not keep his 'bosom franchised and allegiance clear.'

Banquo is the first to see and to speak to those Weird Sisters, or, as they may for the purpose of this work be called, Evil Passions which seize man, and tempting him to his own undoing, forge fetters which no hand can unloose.

But he, the brave, the modest soldier, the man who felt himself repaid for all his toil, could he but

'Grow in his sovereign's heart,'

was proof against the foul temptation; he thrust it behind him, 'Apaga Satana,' but not before it had held him in its cruel grasp, racked and torn his soul even while he prayed for the restraint of those 'cursed thoughts' which entered in and held possession as

'Wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep.'

With Macbeth all is different. We meet him first when, flushed by victory, he is honoured by his king, adored by his soldiers, feared by his foes.

Surely the pinnacle he stood upon was high enough for any man. But not for the proud Macbeth. His whole life was poisoned by the bitter feeling of injustice; for usurpation had already wrested the throne from the rightful heir. He himself was of the reigning house, while in his wife's veins, even more directly than in Duncan's, flowed the blood royal. His ambitious, proud, revengeful feelings had been firmly held in check, until the immensity of his power and influence, as contrasted with the weakness of the gentle Duncan, were forcibly brought home to him, so that he saw how, like Cawdor, he would rise in rebellion; but he also saw how, unlike Cawdor, he would not fail. And so, after one brief struggle with his better self, for the 'milk of human kindness' cannot be destroyed all at once, he yields to that suggestion whose

> 'Horrid image doth unfix [the] hair,
> And make [s the] seated heart knock at [the] ribs.'

Silently waiting for this moment were those Passions. Tirelessly, relentlessly, remorselessly waiting. Waiting until that man for whose soul they hungered should, by seeking their counsel, give them the power over him they could not otherwise obtain. Their object now was to wait no longer, but to seize and make him prisoner, lead him through the dreary halls of hell, showing him

> 'Things that ought to be seen,
> Sights that are abominable,
> Secrets that are unutterable.'
>
> *De Quincey.*

There did they plague his heart, and there those Passions used that Man, before whom they had bowed their heads in silent awe; for the divine impress had not faded away; the Man had then not parted from his Maker.

The terrible result of that fatal act may best be told in Macbeth's own words :—

'I have lived long enough; my way of life
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As love, honour, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead
Curses, not loud but deep; mouth-honour, breath
Which my poor heart would fain deny and dare not.'

His death, by which is fulfilled the last of the prophecies lies without the scope of this work.

Upon that broken human life, dare any human being pass sentence?

Read again the Allegory :—

'Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be Tempest-tost.'

Man sees the deed, God the circumstance.

'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

'MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.'

Rise of the Fairies: Their connection with the Olympian gods; Shakespeare their preserver; Dreamland their realm; Pucks and Dwarfs of the Congo Forest; The three-fold girdle; Passing of the Fairies.

PROBABLY the time will never come which will see the world quite free from superstition, and probably were it so to do we should be the poorer. For in its lighter forms irrational belief has given rise to many a graceful fancy. So in early days, when the world was young, and primal man knew no god but Pan, the great god of Nature, it was borne in upon him, he knew not how, that there was another type of life akin to but distinct from his own. And as he listened in the unreality of moonlight to the whisperings of the leaves, sighing of the winds, and the low, sad moan of the waves, he heard voices. For the children of Pan were calling, and the children of Man replied, as their hearts went forth in greeting to their unseen kindred, and as time grew older and life grew gentler, there arose a belief in a being so delicate, that dew-drops and honey were sufficient for its nourishment, and so tiny that it could hide in a cowslip's bell.

Human in form as human in nature was this 'duodecimo edition' of Mankind. Beautiful beyond compare, like a dream ethereal and colourless, soft as a heavenly cloud or mist, was this fairy, this child of the imagination, but separated from man its creator by a gulf eternally fixed, for absolutely soulless is the Fairy, and though capable of a certain faithfulness to memory, its gossamer nature is incapable of obeying the highest of all emotions, renunciation and love, without which no soul can be said to live.

In 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' the Fairies have travelled from 'the farthest steppe of India' to Athens, the classic home of the gods, and in the persons of Oberon and Titania, with their attendant train, may be found the 'Mediæval representatives' of the gods of great Olympus, who once ruled the destinies of the human race. On still they travelled; ever westward, brought by the resistless hand of Time, until they found a footing in our island home. And here dark legend gathered round them, and many a terrible deed of cruelty was attributed to the innocent elve.

The pleasure-loving thing was doomed :—when

'An immortal shade

stepped forth, and

Dared time's irresistible affront.'

For with his enchanter's wand, he touched that ethereal life now passing, giving it a glory and a

vitality hitherto unknown, and now, no more a mere child of Nature, an Olympian god. It shone bright with a celestial fire, undreamt of in its early days. Pure as Aphrodite new risen from the foam. Recreate as the Phœnix from the ashes of the past. Speaking to man at times even with

> . . . 'The imagin'd voice of God himself;
> The very opener and intelligencer.'
> [It] 'directs our fancies,
> Saving mortals from despair,
> And we forget our sorrows,
> Building castles in the air.'

But the mischievous elves of Oberon's train, forgetful of their newer higher life, delight to entangle the love-threads of the irresponsible mortals whom they alone can influence, for such 'coils' please them most 'preposterously,' and man at their bidding commits such follies that well may Puck exclaim :— 'Lord, what fools these mortals be!' 'But a spirit of another sort' is Oberon 'the white light of dawn,' lord of the Realm of Dreams he reigns, with Titania his queen, sister to Titan the Sun-God, sprung from 'tithá' fire, surrounded by their Knights and Elves, the bright spirits of light. They revel in the moonlight as it gently sheds a silvery veil over the tired earth, and in this 'fairy time' invisible forms hover around sleeping man. Queen Mab herself drew near the greatest intellect of all ages, and as

. . . 'Imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown'

delicately she delivered those

. . . 'Children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.'

and bringing them to him, the human mortal, he with

. . . 'Poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.'

And now thought slides down from Fairy haunts to the mysterious African forest primeval, over whose gloomy depths there often hangs a stillness so intense that it may be felt, and the fire-fly flashing past is the only sign of life. Here, dwelling on the river-banks of the Congo Forest, live tribes of dusky dwarfs, whose existence, until Sir Harry Johnston's recent discovery, had been regarded as a myth. They must have lived there from time immemorial, no records existing to show how long. Strange are their ways. Loving darkness rather than light, they exist in caves, disappear as into space, are full of an impish mischief when angered, but should the big black neighbour leave a bowl of milk or banana bunch at the door of his hut for the tiny mid-night visitor he will find, when morning breaks, the weeds cleared from his plantation, or some other kindly act from the grateful little man. Should, however, no gift be forthcoming, the dwarf will take a prompt revenge, and instead of clearing away weeds will let in a herd of elephants to feed upon the banana-grove by way of recalling 'benefits forgot.'

Or again some Negro mother when waking will find her bonny babe has gone and in its place is a

small, peaky changeling. On the whole, however, the big and little man live together in amity and friendship.

'Undoubtedly,' says Sir Harry Johnston, 'to my thinking, most fairy Myths arose from the contemplation of the mysterious habits of dwarf troglodite races lingering on still in the crannies, caverns, forests and mountains of Europe, after the invasion of neolithic man.'

Be that as it may, certain it is that to give the habits of the Pucks, our household fairies, is but to repeat the life-history of the Dwarfs of the Congo Forest. The Pucks came to us with the first Teutonic settlers of our island, and stories of their doings have already long been common among the people.

They were playfully malicious, yet kindly in their way. They would mislead the traveller in the shape of a false light and enjoy his dismay, yet for a bowl of milk would thresh as much corn in a night as nine men could do in a day; or they would clean up the house for the maids, if plentifully fed with cream, but this rendered superfluous Pucks an expensive luxury.

A story exists of a man whose kitchen being infested with more Pucks than he could find cream for, who thought to escape them all by moving house. As he jogged along to his new home with all his movables in a cart, a neighbour met him and said 'What! Tom, are you moving?' 'Yes,' cried a Puck, popping up his head among the furniture, 'we're moving.'

Puck claims that he can put

> '. . . a girdle round about the earth
> In forty minutes,'

but surely in our own way, by harnessing the powers of Nature, man has done more than the fairy could do. In June 1897 a Woman, though weakened by age, responsibility, and sorrow, was yet strong enough to put a girdle round the earth, as

> 'In general honest thought
> And common good to all,'

Queen Victoria sent her kindly message—

> 'From my heart I thank my beloved people. May God bless them.'

And as it flashed on, throughout the length and breadth of an Empire upon which the Sun never sets, surely there arose in the hearts of all her subjects a determination to keep that girdle unbroken, or to count life well lost in the attempt.

And yet another girdle has been placed around this earth, but placed amid no boom of guns or blare of trumpets. It began its course three centuries since, when a man was born so great that probably he never realised his own greatness. He too—

> 'In general honest thought
> And common good to all,'

had a message to deliver ere he died :—

> '. . . To thine own self be true,
> And it must follow as the night the day,
> Thou can'st not then be false to any man."

Not flashing along wire and cable, but sinking slowly, deeply, surely, into the hearts of men, the touch of human nature keeping it alive until, encircling the globe with a strength that can never be broken, that girdle is made fast by the drop of British blood which unites all English-speaking people in kin-ship with William Shakespeare.

* * *

The 'dream' is drawing to a close; not for much longer is

'. . . a bush supposed a bear,'

Puck has gone

. . 'with broom before
To sweep the dust behind the door,'

for now the 'eyeballs' of the mortals

'. . . roll with wonted sight.'

The hour of the awakening is at hand, and these natural souls, 'children of an idle brain,' shiver as the Reaper with his scythe draws near, and their thoughts hark back to the days when the 'shadows of an earlier, formless, divine world' gathered round them and they recked not of the gates which close '. . . against a setting sun.'

Once has Time's dread hand been stayed, yet by Time, who gave them birth, will their days be numbered, for in the hereafter when Time shall be no more, neither may the Fairy be.

'Before the inaudible and noiseless foot of time'

the sun himself will pale, and only the essence of his glory will remain. In that essence, the great white light of Truth, the fairy has no place.

For it is but of

> ' . . such stuff
> As dreams are made on and [its] little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.'

'THE TEMPEST'

'The Tempest,' founded on Strachey's 'Account of a Shipwreck off the Bermudas.' Mystery of 'The Tempest' never yet solved, truth being veiled in allegory and imagery. Myth of the Phœdrus destiny. The spirit pleads for mercy. 'The nobler action is in virtue than in vengeance.' Power of Magic and the truth of Immortality.

THE Spirit-world in which Shakespeare concludes his supernatural plays, is one in which those who have eyes to see may find deep truths. Even in this age of enlightenment the belief in spirits has not died out. Far from it, but in Shakespeare's day it was perhaps more material than now. If, in the sense in which he wrote, judging by the mere surface, men no longer have faith, and some may assert that to see more is pure fancy (in that he meant only to beguile the passing hour), surely it is insight which is at fault. For none can credit that the inspired mind was actuated only to create a child's fairy tale of enchantment, unless in that fairy tale were to be found enshrined the highest of truths.

'The heavens and the earth and all that therein is,' think ye they were created for a jest and that as shadows they shall come and go? Nay, rather believe that the Powers were in grim and deadly earnest when they resolved on the making of Man

and that the Light which broke the darkness as the first divine command went thundering forth, turning into form and might the shapeless dust, had a direct purpose to fulfil ere it could return from whence it came, and that the breath which breathed forth immortality was no wind blowing where it listed but some heavenly Power to act as

'. . . guide within this fearful country.'

In 'The Tempest' Shakespeare has followed very carefully a wonderful tale of adventure and shipwreck as told by the survivors. William Strachey speaks of a 'dreadful storm and hideous;' of a 'hell of darkness,' of a 'sea that swelled above the clouds and gave Batelle unto Heaven:' of a 'little round light like a Starre trembling . . . upon the Maine Mast and shooting from Shroud to Shroud;' of the 'shippe, runne ashore as neere the land as could be:' of the 'dangerous and dreaded islands of Bermudas:' which are 'feared and avoyded of all sea-travellers above any.' But, said Jordan, 'We found the ayre . . . temperate and the country . . . fruitful of fit necessaries for the . . . preservation of man's life . . . Therefore, my opinion sincerely of this island is, whereas it hath been and is still accounted the most dangerous, unfortunate and forlorn place of the world, it is in truth the richest, healthfulest, and most pleasing land . . . as ever man set foot upon.'

This play, perhaps more than most of Shakespeare's, possesses the gift of baffling all enquiry. Its meaning is there, but what? and where? He who read the secrets of the stars, had knowledge which has foiled the deepest searching of generation after generation. It may be that there is truth in the beautiful myth of the Phædrus, that once in a lifetime it is given to certain souls to follow in the train of the primeval gods, to scale the empyrean heights, there to see the visions of things that have been—things that are—and through them the things that shall be, and that the memory of that vision can never fade. To one far-seeing mind was the whole tale of 'Impulse, Thought and Deed' unfolded, and he learned that no man escapes the consequences of his own act. That, though no eye may see or no tongue may tell, yet 'Measure still for Measure shall be meted out.'

As well try to

'Wound the loud winds or with bemock'd-at stabs
Kill the still closing waters, as diminish one dowle that's in my plume,'

saith the 'minister of Fate.'

The powers may delay, but they forget not, and now, after twelve long years of seeming security, was Alonzo's limit reached, and to his guilty but repentant soul did the seas and shores and all the creatures cry out, incensed against his peace :—

'Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it:
The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,

That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounced
The name of Prosper; it did bass my trespass.
Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded; and
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,
And with him there lie mudded.'

But, even as he 'put off hope' the 'god of power' sent 'spirits . . . from their confines called,' who to his sin-charged soul brought 'heart's sorrow,' and the promise that a 'clear life ensuing' should save him from the wrath of 'lingering perdition—

'Worse than any death can be at once.'

For twelve lengthy years had the powers delayed, but they forgat not the banished Prospero, lord of that enchanted island on which Alonzo was so completely wrecked. Now had 'the project gathered to a head,' for the

'. . . Gods above had chalked forth the way,'

and the highest charm was working a

'Sea-change into something rare and strange.'

And Prospero himself was 'vexed,' and his brain 'troubled.' He fain would still his 'beating-mind.' And as he took 'a turn or two' his 'nobler reason' overcame his natural 'fury,' for with his 'high wrongs' he was 'struck to the quick.' As a kindly pity welled within him, the 'vanity of his art' left him, so that he adjured all the 'rough magic' for the tender magic of his vast humanity.

Then, and not till then, did the 'Tempest' cease the 'wild waves whist' for 'with an invisible and subtle

strength,' 'an attribute to God Himself' had now come down to 'instrument this lower world.' And as Mercy breathed from the spirit of Prospero, the 'young-eyed cherubin' caught up and quired forth the anthem of 'Kindness nobler ever than revenge' till 'Heaven itself grew drowsy with the harmony.'

'The day of magic has gone by.' As Prospero himself says,

> 'Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air:
> And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces.
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherits, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind.'

Broken now is the magic wand, drowned 'deeper than did e'er plummet sound,' are the magic books. Prospero, the great magician, has o'er-thrown his charms, and stands revealed the great Stratfordian who 'is mighty yet.'

> 'His spirit walks abroad.'

The power of magic is with us still and the mysterious relations which it emblemed are immortal.

Those who are privileged to stand in the Chancel of the Church of the Holy Trinity alone with the mighty dead, must realise the immensity of the living truth of Immortality.

For, though the mere body lies dead beneath the flags, his great God-given-gift still quickens and glorifies.

We read his works, we see his plays, imbued with 'beauty the eye cannot see, music which is only heard in silence.' Though the brain that conceived and the hand that wrote lie still in death, though nearly three hundred years have come and gone since he passed to rest, his writings have yet the power to knit the hearts of nations into one, as

'From the four corners of the earth they come,
To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint.'

Folk-lore, Superstition and Witchcraft in Shakespeare:

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